

Statement on the National Education Goals Report*December 10, 1998*

Today's release of the annual National Education Goals Report shows that America has made some progress toward achieving the National Education Goals but still has a long way to go. If we are going to reach these goals, we must strengthen accountability and raise standards for students, teachers, and schools. I will continue to press Congress to help give our students smaller classes, well-prepared teachers, and modernized school buildings. I will continue my efforts to expand access to early childhood programs, increase public school choice, make our schools safe, disciplined, and drug free, open the doors of college education, and help Americans engage in lifelong learning.

I am pleased at the progress that the report shows in helping our young children arrive at school ready to learn, improving student achievement in math, and increasing the participation of women and minorities in math and science in higher education. Those responsible for such gains—parents and teachers, local and State education officials, colleges and universities, the business community, and students themselves—should be proud of what they have accomplished.

But we must do more. Education is a local function, a State responsibility, and a national priority. The National Education Goals define excellence in education, and Americans at all levels must redouble our efforts to meet them.

Remarks Following Discussions With Central American Leaders*December 11, 1998*

President Clinton. Good morning. I have just concluded a very good meeting with the leaders of five Central American nations: President Rodriguez of Costa Rica, President Flores of Honduras, President Aleman of Nicaragua, President Calderon Sol of El Salvador, and Vice President Flores of Guatemala. We send our best wishes to President Arzu, who is in Guatemala recovering from a bout of pneumonia.

Over the past decade, Central Americans have transformed their countries. Nations where freedom once was denied, where there was once fear and violence, have now joined their neighbors as democracies in peace. Economic development has raised many from poverty. Now nature has put that progress at risk.

Central American nations face in varying degrees the formidable task of rebuilding from the region's deadliest storm in modern history: 9,000 confirmed dead, another 9,000 missing and feared dead, 3 million people homeless or displaced. The hurricane destroyed schools, hospitals, farms, utilities, roads, and bridges.

The governments and people of the region have made tremendous efforts to address this crisis, showing great courage and strength. But they are not, and they never will be, alone. I say to the leaders here and to the people of Central America, the United States will continue to do everything we can. *Ayudaremos a nuestros hermanos*. We will help our brothers and sisters. It is the right thing to do. And I say to my fellow Americans, it also serves our long-term interests in a stable, free, and prosperous hemisphere.

I'm very pleased that we have achieved an era of growing cooperation, respect, and friendship among the nations of the Americas. We stand together for democracy, opportunity, and peace. We stand together in good times and bad. The United States already has committed \$283 million in assistance, and we will provide an additional \$17 million through AID for food assistance.

Thousands of our troops and civilian officials are now in the region supporting relief efforts. With our help and with the help of others, the people of Central America have reopened roads, contained disease, restored drinking water in many areas. Both the First Lady and Tipper Gore have visited the region, and last month, they led a conference of charitable organizations to coordinate aid.

Now we are shifting our focus to reconstruction. And the United States will do our share there as well. Working with Congress on a bipartisan basis, our effort will include funds for rebuilding, debt relief and new financing, trade and investment initiatives, and immigration relief.